



What Have You Done to Save a Life Today?



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Be Alert, Awake and Alive

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Spring and summer are a great time to hit the road, enjoy the scenery and take a vacation. For many that means a road trip, possibly hundreds of miles long. And with high-speed interstates, it's possible to cover a lot of ground in a day's drive. But sometimes we allow our hurry to get to our destination, or the activities we enjoy once we get there, to intrude into our normal rest times. We take it in stride, thinking it's relatively harmless. After all, it's not like driving drunk -or is it?

The truth is, according to the National Sleep Foundation, studies show that being awake for more than 20 hours straight can impair your driving skills the same as being legally drunk. And, if you've ever sat through an Army safety briefing, you've heard what a problem that can be. However, did you know that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports more than 1,500 people are killed and over 71,000 are injured each year in fatigue-related crashes? It might be even more sobering to realize an NSF survey revealed 20 percent of drivers reported falling asleep at the wheel during the previous year. Could that drowsy driver be someone on the highway next to you? Could it be you?

It shouldn't be much of a surprise that the most dangerous times are between midnight and 8 a.m. — a time when your body would rather have you hitting the pillow than the road. Recognizing that, it's wise to watch out for the following signs as you drive.

Are you:

- Having trouble focusing, keeping your eyes open or your head up.
- Yawning or rubbing your eyes repeatedly.
- Daydreaming or having wandering thoughts.
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating or missing signs and exits.
- Feeling restless, irritable or aggressive.
- Turning up the radio or rolling down the window.
- Experiencing slower reaction times or demonstrating poor judgment.

To avoid making it into the accident column, the NSF recommends you protect yourself, your passengers and others on the road by taking the following steps:

- Get a good night's sleep before a long drive. Note: You'll be asked how much pre-travel sleep you plan to get when using the Travel Risk Planning System (TRiPS) program to plan your trip.
- Pull over immediately at a safe place and take a short (15- 20-minute) nap.
- Drive with a friend. A passenger who remains awake can help watch for signs of fatigue in the driver and can take a turn driving, if necessary.
- Always wear your seat belt.

For more information on how to avoid the dangers of drowsy driving, check out the following websites: www.drowsydriving.org/, www.nhtsa.org and <https://safety.army.mil/>.



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